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News - Living Here Sunday, Jun. 24, 2012

# Home sweet home: Why we love living here

By DAWN HINSHAW

Who hasn't thought it, when the daffodils bloom or the baseball team jogs onto the field, kicking up clay on opening day?

This is why we love living here.

Spring reminds us.



Jim and Frankie McLean built their cozy country home in Blythewood more than 40 years ago.

- Kim Kim Foster-Tobin /kkfoster@thestate.com

GALLERY: Living Here Homes

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STORY: Lakeside living: More than a home, a lifestyle

## The ABCs of schools

For families moving to the Columbia area, schools are a key factor in deciding where to put down roots.

In Richland, Lexington and Kershaw counties, there are eight public school districts.

Top of the class: Three districts are rated consistently among the top academic performers statewide: Richland 2, in Northeast Richland; Lexington-Richland 5, in Irmo-Chapin; and Lexington 1, serving the town of Lexington and surrounding communities.

Where everyone knows your name: Lexington 3, in Batesburg-Leesville, and Lexington 4, in Gaston-Swansea, are the smallest districts. Each has one primary school, one elementary school, one middle school and one high school, so students grow up together. Other districts, serving some of the area's small communities, include Lexington 2, in Cayce-West Columbia, and Kershaw County Schools, in

It comes early, following an easygoing autumn and tolerable winter, with infrequent snows that turn the entire state into children with an unexpected day off school.

But there's more than great weather to recommend us here in the Midlands.

The Columbia area has much to offer: history, architecture, walk able neighborhoods, hospitality, fascinating politics, diversity, stimulating college life — and engaged citizens working to make all that even better.

As new residents explore living in the Columbia area — and more than 120,000 people moved to the metropolitan area in the past decade — the variety of communities and home sites is pleasantly surprising.

Historic downtown neighborhoods, orderly with antebellum homes, mill houses and bungalows, have gained esteem in recent years. They offer sidewalks, grand trees, parks and gardens.

Most recently, downtown storefronts have been reconstructed into deluxe condominiums where residents can easily take advantage of art exhibitions, college lectures and concerts, riverfront recreation.

Just minutes from downtown are ranch-style neighborhoods, with their large lots and convenient shopping. Farther out are new suburban communities, move-in ready and loaded with the extras that can make owning a home hassle-free.

Out in the country or on the lake, people wave as they pass on two-lane roads.

Spring reminds us.

But in the end, it's our neighbors who make living here feel like home.

Dawn Hinshaw writes about people, historic preservation and county government for The State.

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Camden and the fast-growing Elgin communities.

Rising to the challenge: Among Richland 1 's specialized programs is the Challenger Learning Center. Since 1996, the only space flight simulator in South Carolina has transported thousands of students, teachers and visitors across the galaxy of imagination for special studies of science and math. The center is named for the astronauts who died in the Space Shuttle Challenger 51-L mission — among them, S.C. native Ron McNair. Richland 1 serves downtown Columbia, first-ring suburban areas and rural Lower Richland.

Private school options: There are several private schools in close proximity to downtown Columbia, many offering accelerated academic programs. Among the largest, with programs through the high school level, are Heathwood Hall Episocopal School, Hammond School, Cardinal Newman School and Ben Lippen School. Other private schools address students with specialized needs, among them Glenforest School, Sandhills School and Hope Academy.

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